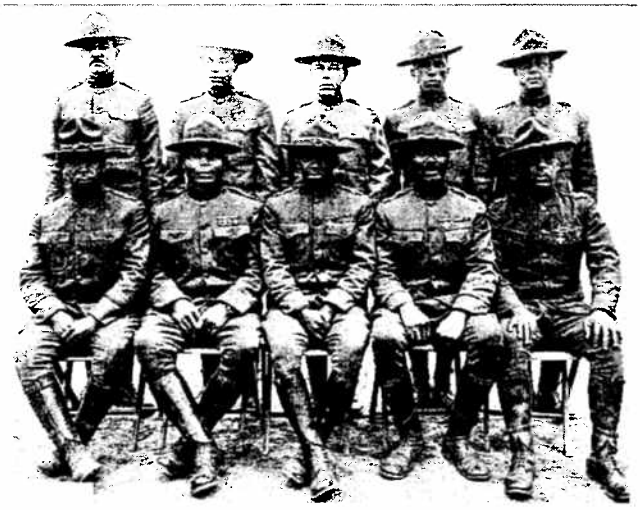
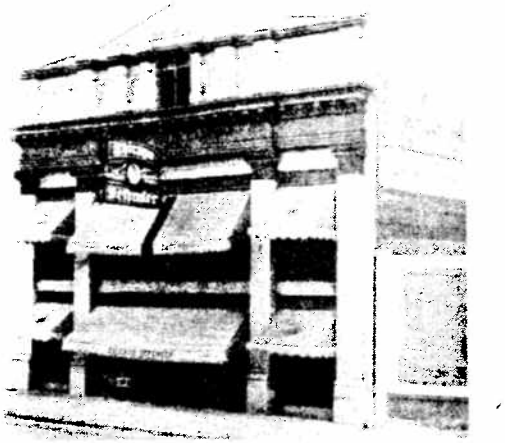
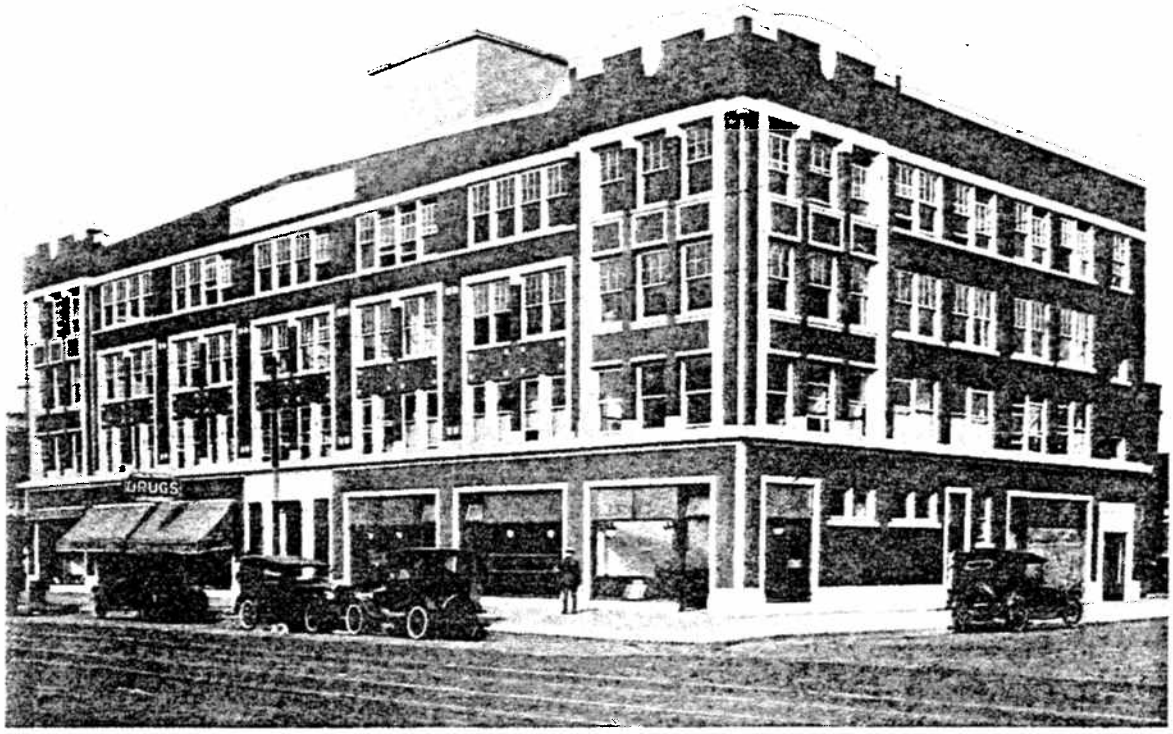
PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION







The Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in March, 1984; revised December 1994
Recommended to the City Council on August 28, 1997

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Christopher R. Hill, Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The Commission makes its recommendation to the City Council after careful consideration. The process begins with an extensive staff study, summarized in this report, which discusses the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark.

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the Commission's recommendation to the City Council should be regarded as final.

Cover: **Two of the surviving structures in "Black Metropolis" are: (top right) the Chicago Defender Building, 3425 S. Indiana Ave. and (bottom) the Overton Hygienic Building, 3619 S. State St., circa 1925. Top left: officers from the 370th U.S. Infantry, which during World War I included members of the Eighth Regiment of the Illinois National Guard. A monument to the regiment, as well as its original armory, also are part of the proposed Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District.**

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Greatest Triumph For The Race in The Annals of Local History

STATE STREET from 31st STREET to 35th STREET

GRAND AUGUST CARNIVAL and NEGRO EXPOSITION

STATE STREET from 31st STREET to 35th STREET

TWO BIG WEEKS of MIRTH, MERRIMENT and REVIEW

August 17th to 31st, 1912

Construction of Arches, Pillars, etc., to be a work of Art. Designs for the Street Decorations will be a Revelation of Incomparable Beauty. Overhead Lighting, Multi-colored effects—a Veritable Blaze of Glory.

A Special Feature For Each Day's Program

Every Military Organization, all Secret Orders, Associations, Clubs, Institutions, to be Featured in this Stupendous Display of Thrift. Daily Parades—Music Everywhere—Amusements. Watch weekly papers for later announcements or call "Douglas 1565" for Concessions, etc.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN CHICAGO TO BE THE QUEEN OF THE GRAND AUGUST CARNIVAL

$100.00 One Hundred Dollars

To The One Elected Queen

Cut out this Coupon and vote for the Lady you think is the most beautiful

I Vote For M.....

.....Street

Cut Out Coupon and mail to THE CARNIVAL DEPARTMENT, THE CHICAGO DEFENDER, 3159 STATE STREET.

JESSE BINGA, Banker
RANKIN & WHITE, Druggists
PETER P. JONES, Photographer
VIRGIL MACKEY, Tailor
ROBERT S. ABBOTT, Publisher
COMMITTEE.

JESSE BINGA, Manager.

Corner 36th Place and State Street

By the time of this event in 1912, an independent African-American business community had developed on Chicago's South Side.

1850 to 1870 alone, the African-American population in Chicago grew from 320 to almost 3,700.

Settlement was concentrated in small pockets in various parts of the city, with the largest being on the Near South Side. By 1870, the boundaries of the South Side community were established in a long narrow strip, often known as the "Black Belt." Bordered on the west by railyards and industrial properties and on the east by affluent white residential neighborhoods, the belt extended from Van Buren Street (in the Loop) to 39th Street, a distance of nearly five miles.

Chicago's business and social establishment was largely indifferent to the African-American community. Consequently, what gradually evolved in the "Black Belt" was a complete and independent commercial, social, and political base. As the community grew, it began to satisfy its own demand for goods and services. By 1885, it had diversified to such an extent that a complete directory of African-American businesses was published, *The Colored Men's Professional and Business Directory of Chicago.*

The community's political strength was shown in the election of John Jones to the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1874. Jones, a tailor of mixed free-black and white parentage, was supported by both African-Americans and whites and was the first African-American to hold elected office in Illinois.

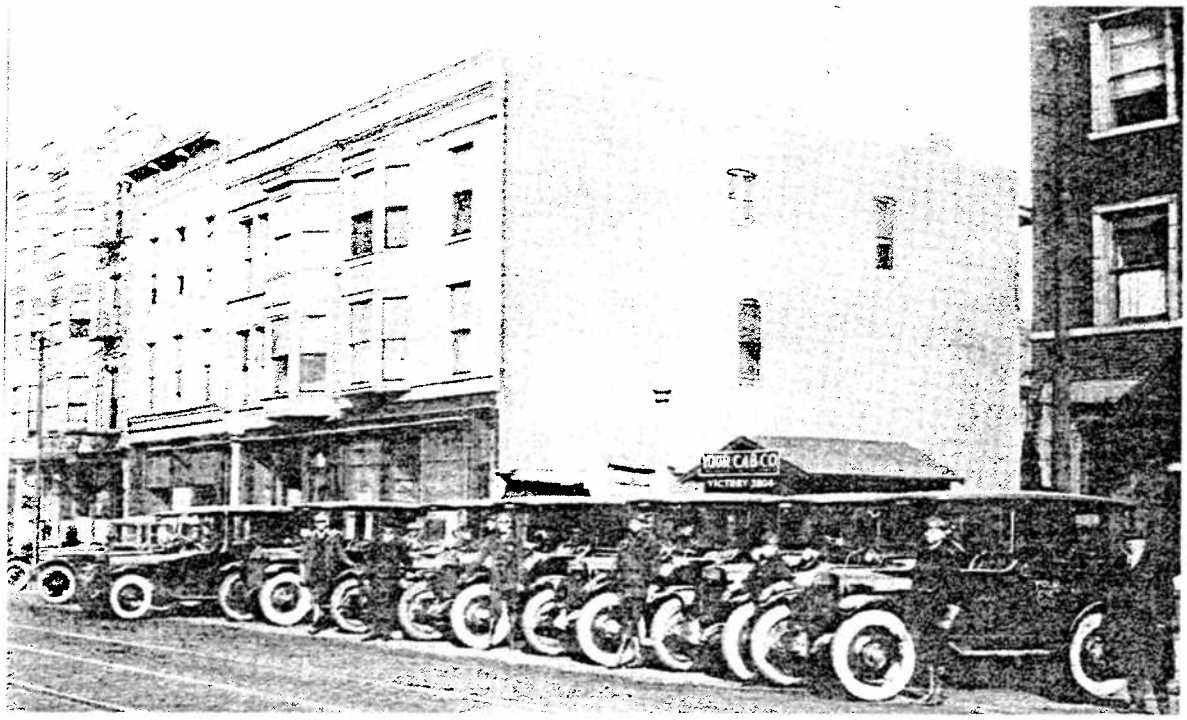
By 1900, with a population of 30,000, the burgeoning South Side community began to take on the characteristics of a small "city-within-a-city." A major factor in the growth of Black Metropolis was its increasing access to financial resources due to the prosperity of the African-American community. As a result, the unwillingness of the white financial community to support African-American enterprises became much less of an obstacle. By 1908, Chicago's first African American-owned bank was founded by entrepreneur Jesse Binga. With greater financial resources, the commercial and business interests of Black Metropolis continued to diversify into a wide range of professional, commercial, and manufacturing interests.

Much of the reason for the access to financial resources was due to the phenomenal increase in the community's population. Between 1910 and 1920 (a period often referred to as the "Great Migration" due to the numbers of African-Americans who left the South for opportunities in the North), Chicago's African-American population increased 150 percent, reaching 110,000 by 1920. With such rapid growth, Black Metropolis was able to thrive despite the fact that it was essentially cut off from the economic and social mainstream of the rest of the city.

A Distinct Community Develops (1910-25)

Beginning with the establishment of the Binga Bank, the vicinity of State and 35th streets was transformed into the "Wall Street" of the South Side. Until the Great Migration, African-American businesses had located in existing residential and small storefront buildings that had been adapted for business purposes, often with unsatisfactory results. New construction was limited mainly to a handful of small, one- and two-story structures which were built as investments by white speculators with an eye on the growing potential of the African-American economic market.

This trend was reversed in 1916 when ground was broken for the Jordan Building at State and 36th streets, an impressive combination store and apartment building



One of the most visible African-American owned businesses in Black Metropolis was the Your Cab Company, 3535 S. State St. Its fleet had grown to 70 cabs by the time this photo was taken in 1925.

that was commissioned by songwriter and music publisher, Joseph J. Jordan (see page 35). This precedent was closely followed by a series of ambitious African-American-owned and -financed projects that were carried out along State Street throughout the 1920s. The most important of these included:

- the Overton Hygienic Building, the combination store, office, and manufacturing building commissioned by entrepreneur Anthony Overton;

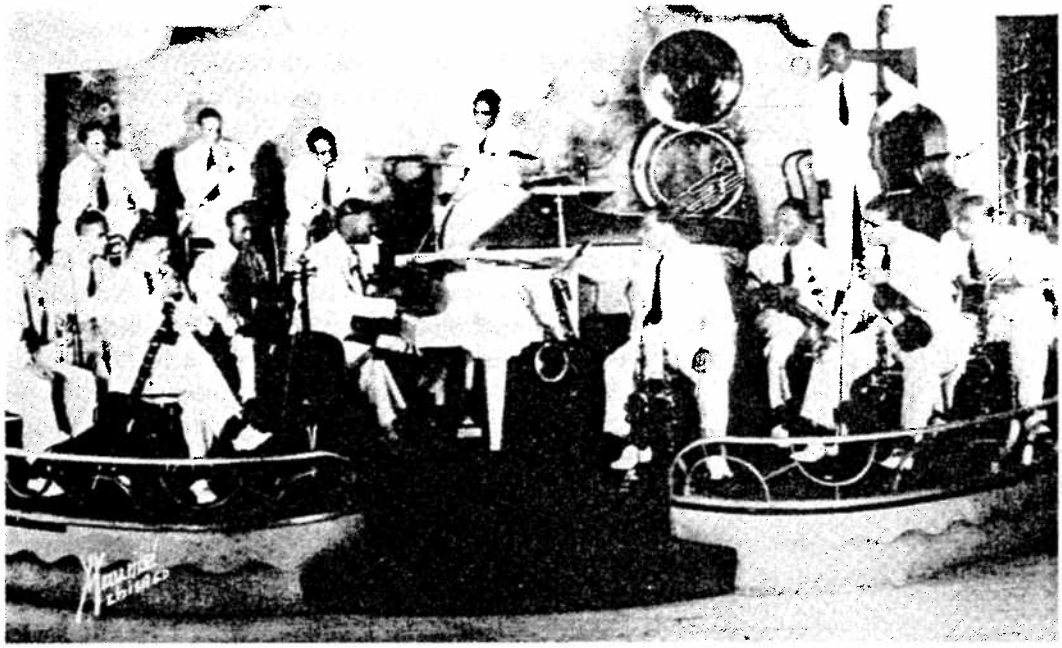
- the Chicago Bee Building, also commissioned by Overton, housed the *Chicago Bee* newspaper;

- the seven-story Knights of Pythias Building, erected by a prominent fraternal lodge after plans by Chicago's first African-American architect, Walter T. Bailey; and

- the quarters of the Binga Bank and the Binga Arcade Building, built by banker Jesse Binga.

Of these, only the Overton Hygienic and Chicago Bee buildings still survive. Having been altered very little, they remain largely as originally designed.

An unidentified bank in Black Metropolis, c.1922. Chicago's first African-American owned bank had been founded in 1908 by Jesse Binga.



Jazz clubs were scattered throughout the Black Metropolis business district. One of the most prominent was the Grand Terrace, home of Earl Hines' orchestra (above).

Chicago's Jazz Center

In stark contrast to the business conducted by day on State Street, the area was transformed at night by the bright lights and exciting sounds of nightclubs and all-night restaurants, which were scattered throughout the business district. These included popular jazz clubs where such notable musicians as King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton played and earned Chicago its reputation as a jazz center in the 1920s. Many of the musicians had arrived from New Orleans, St. Louis, and other points south, each bringing with them characteristics of the musical style of their origins. The combination of regional styles soon melded into a distinct musical character that was uniquely Chicago.

Beginning with Robert T. Motts' Pekin Theater at 2700 S. State St., which opened in 1905, many music-oriented clubs and cafes were established during the following decade. Among the most famous were the Dreamland Cafe at 3618 S. State St., the Royal Gardens (later Lincoln Gardens) at 459 E. 31st St., the Elite Club at 3030 S. State St., and the Sunset Cafe/Grand Terrace at 315 E. 35th Street.

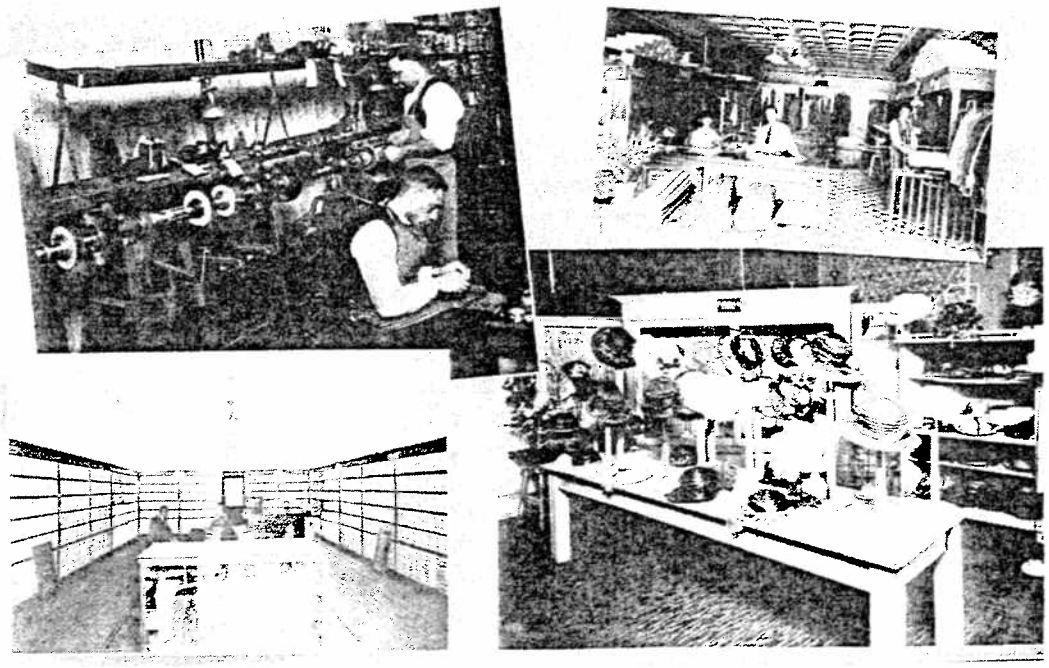
The Pekin was the first full-scale, African-American-owned and operated theater in Chicago. It provided the community with its first entertainment venue free of racial restrictions. Under the guidance of Jordan,

its music director from 1903-12, the Pekin became the showcase for Chicago's African-American musical development. It provided the transition from the St. Louis-influenced ragtime music of the turn of the century to the innovative jazz music of the teens and twenties.

A notable and notorious club was the white-owned Panama at the southeast corner of State and 35th streets. Actress and cabaret performer Florence Mills got her start there as part of the Panama Trio. Her pianist was the noted performer and songwriter Tony Jackson, best known for composing the million-dollar hit "Pretty Baby" in 1916. The musical intensity of the area around the Panama was such that it once was suggested that if a horn were held up at the corner of State and 35th streets it would play itself.

First African-American Alderman

Churches were instrumental in the development of Black Metropolis, both from a spiritual and social standpoint. Large congregations such as the Olivet Baptist Church and Pilgrim Baptist Church conducted extensive social programs and helped secure lodging and employment for the newcomers arriving from the South. Similar

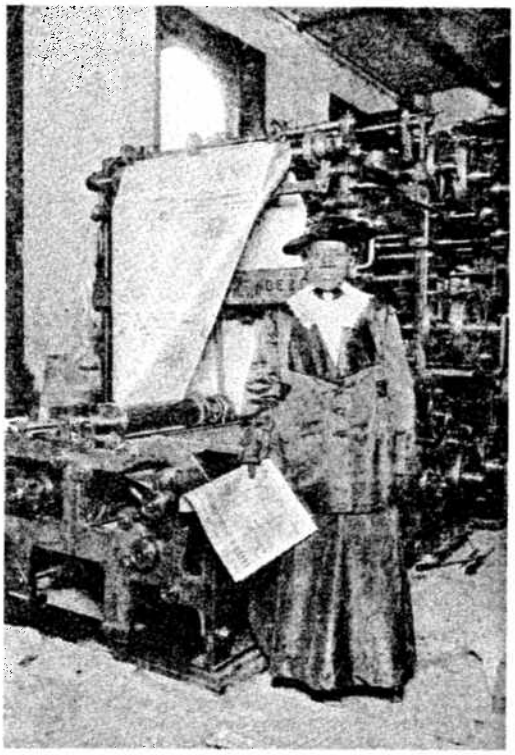


A complete business community developed in Black Metropolis, as seen in this illustration from a 1925 publication on the area.

programs were conducted at the Wabash Avenue YMCA (3763 S. Wabash Ave.), which opened in 1913 through the impetus of philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, the chairman of Sears, Roebuck & Company, who had a strong interest in African-American-oriented causes.

Organized political alliances gave Black Metropolis increased participation in city government, beginning with the election of Oscar DePriest as the city's first African-American alderman in 1915. DePriest initially worked with the white Republican bosses who controlled the political destiny of the Black Metropolis wards. He eventually, however, built a political organization of his own, the Peoples Movement Club, and set up its headquarters in what was formerly a Jewish social club at 3140 S. Indiana Ave. While DePriest's was the most influential African-American political organization, it did face stiff competition from rivals within the African-American community.

The voting strength of the Black Metropolis wards was such that by the 1920s the political control was effectively taken from the white bosses. Gains were made in representation in municipal government as well as in the state legislature. In 1928, DePriest had the distinction of being the first African-American from the North to be elected to a seat in the U. S. House of Representatives, where he served for three consecutive terms.



Flora Sengstacke, the mother of the Chicago Defender's founder, Robert Abbott, with one of the first papers to come off its new presses in 1921.

Center of Black Journalism

Black Metropolis gained nationwide publicity as a model of African-American achievement, with extensive coverage in both the white and African-American press of the time. Chicago was one of the country's centers of black journalism, having at different times several African-American-owned newspapers, including the *Chicago Whip, Chicago Bee, Broad Axe,* and the *Half Century Magazine.*

The most influential of these was the *Chicago Defender,* a newspaper of nationwide circulation founded by Robert S. Abbott in 1905. The *Defender* had a major impact on thought and development in America through its combination of news items pertinent to African-Americans and strong editorial viewpoints on a wide variety of civil rights issues. In fact, the Great Migration was due in large part to the *Defender's* editorials urging African-Americans to leave the oppression of the South for greater opportunities in Chicago and other Northern destinations.

The Great Depression & Neighborhood Decline (1925-50)

Black Metropolis had reached its height by the mid-1920s. Its activity began to gradually weaken due to socio-economic conditions beyond the control of its developers. Since its growth and prosperity were directly tied to the rapid growth of the African-American population, the sharp decline in new arrivals during the 1920s had the opposite effect. Furthermore, job opportunities had not kept pace with the population increase of the previous decade, and the resulting unemployment hurt the businesses that the community supported.

Already weakened, the financial base deteriorated further when white businessmen, who previously had ignored the area, began to recognize its economic potential. Rather than attempt to break into the prosperous commercial district at 35th and State, white entrepreneurs created an alternate business area along 47th Street where they already controlled most of the property. The introduction of chain stores and other well-financed enterprises presented insurmountable competition to the independent African-American business district and progressively siphoned off its energy and financial base.

Black Metropolis gained nationwide publicity in the 1920s as a model of African-American achievement.

The final blow to Black Metropolis came with the Great Depression of 1929. Whereas most of the community's banks, insurance companies, and other businesses closed, many of the 47th Street businesses were able to survive due to broader access to credit and nationwide financial backing. The self-supporting momentum of Black Metropolis, which its backers had hoped would lead to recognition and eventual integration with the downtown business establishment, was dealt so serious a blow that it has yet to recover.

By 1950, one local writer dismissed the intersection of 35th and State as "Bronzeville's skid-row." Deterioration and then urban renewal took their toll during the 1950s and 1960s. Entire blocks were destroyed along State Street for the construction of public housing projects and the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology. Extensive isolated demolitions have also occurred throughout the community.

Fortunately, many of the most significant buildings of the Black Metropolis have survived, although many are severely deteriorated. Collectively, these buildings are worthy of recognition and preservation as monuments to the determination of the African-American urban pioneers who created them.

Chapter Two
Catalog of Historic Structures

The proposed Black Metropolis Chicago Landmark District is composed of eight individual buildings and one public monument. This district, with only a few differences, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

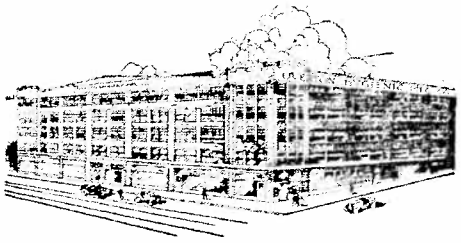
A description of the structures within the proposed landmark district follows. The numbers listed before the name of each building correspond to the map at the beginning of the report.

1. OVERTON HYGIENIC/ DOUGLASS NATIONAL BANK BUILDING 3619-27 S. State St.

Date: 1922-23
Architect: Z. Erol Smith

Promoted during its construction as a "monument to Negro thrift and industry," the Overton Hygienic Building was also a tribute to the business genius of its principal backer, Anthony Overton (1865-1946; see page 36).

Starting with a small cosmetics firm that he built into a major industry through his unrelenting standards of quality and business integrity, Overton eventually expanded his interests into a wide variety of enterprises that were of great importance to the development of Black Metropolis. Among them were: the Victory Life Insurance Company; the *Chicago Bee*, a major African-American newspaper; *The Half Century Magazine*, an African-American-oriented monthly magazine; and the Douglass National Bank, the first African-American bank to be granted a national charter.



Do You Need Money?

If So, This Is Your Chance.

Most of our agents make more money in three hours than they can make elsewhere in a whole day.
You can earn money as fast as you wish.
HIGH-BROWN Products sell twelve months in the year.

IT'S THE HOUSE BEHIND THE AGENT
that means success or failure to the agent in the field.

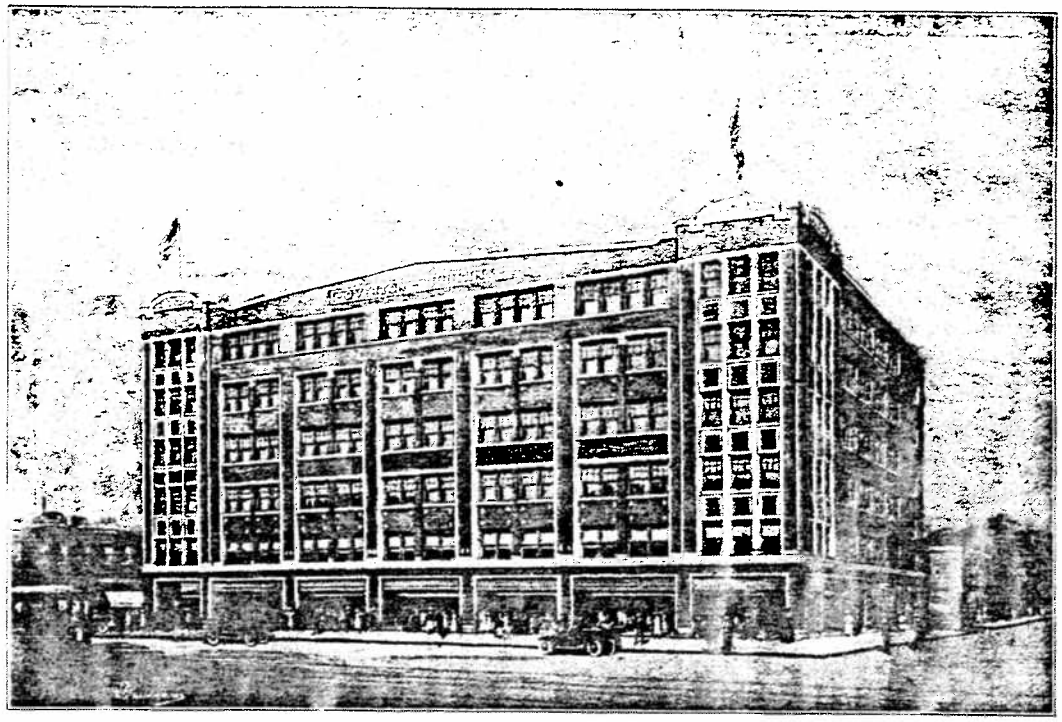
YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO GAMBLE—
Therefore, connect yourself with a reliable institution.
HIGH-BROWN Toilet Preparations are products of proven merit, developed beyond the experimental stage.
They have been used by persons of cultivated tastes and refinement for 25 years.

We Are Offering Unusual Opportunities to Reliable and Energetic Persons.

If you wish to make big money;
If you wish to utilize your spare time profitably;
Or if you wish all-year round steady employment—Opportunity knocks. Write today for agents' terms. If you don't know how to sell, we will teach you

The Overton-Hygienic Mfg. Co.
Dept. H. C. Chicago, Ill.

The success of Overton Hygienic was due, in large part, to innovative advertising and marketing techniques, such as this magazine ad to attract door-to-door sales representatives.



A Monument to Negro Thrift and Industry

An Evidence of Thrift and Industry in Its Most Practical Form

It is our plan to erect such a monument; a building inside and outside that will stand as an everlasting testimonial to Negro Enterprise and thrift.

The building illustrated is the architect's drawing.

This building to be erected on State Street, the principal thoroughfare in the city of Chicago; convenient to all parts of the city, and within easy access to the best and fastest transportation facilities. Located **in the very heart of Colored activities** of Chicago, and only twelve minutes to Chicago's great business center or "Loop"—the greatest retail district in the world.

The building will be owned by the Overton-Hygienic Manufacturing Company, the largest manufacturing enterprise in the United States, owned and operated exclusively by Colored People; sole originators and producers of the famous line of HIGH-BROWN TOILET PREPARATIONS. Our references: R. G. Dun & Co., The Bradstreet Co., or any bank or banker.

The plans call for the finest building ever erected and owned by Colored People, and will be of reinforced concrete, and modern in every respect—absolutely fireproof.

The architect's plans for the building are as follows:

1st Floor—Stores.

2nd Floor—Fifty-two properly equipped and finely finished offices for professional men — Physicians, Dentists, Lawyers, etc.

3rd Floor—Large offices and small halls.

4th Floor—Offices of the Overton-Hygienic Mfg. Co.

5th Floor—Operations division of the Overton-Hygienic Mfg. Co.

6th Floor—Production section, warehouse and laboratories of the Overton Hygienic Mfg. Co.

A 1922 advertisement in Half Century Magazine that sought to raise money for construction of a six-story building for the Overton Hygienic Company. It was subsequently downscaled to four stories.

A 1984 photograph of the Overton Hygienic Building, which stands at the northeast corner of State Street and 36th Place.

By 1922, however, Overton's diverse businesses had outgrown his headquarters at 5200 S. Wabash Ave. and were scattered throughout the South Side. The construction of the Overton Hygienic Building in 1922-23 not only provided quarters for Overton's financial empire but also provided the first new rental office space to be made available to African-American professionals, making the building the prime business address of Black Metropolis.

Overton sought to finance the building through the sale of bonds, much as music publisher Joseph Jordan had done six years earlier with the Jordan Building (see page 43). Overton placed advertisements in *The Half Century Magazine*, which encouraged the African-American community to financially participate in the project. He already had funds to construct a three-story building and was seeking $200,000 more to enable him to build a six-story structure.

Apparently, the bond campaign was not a total success as the actual building was four stories. Nevertheless, the Overton Hygienic Building was an imposing structure, with street facades of yellow-brown, wire-cut brick and white terra-cotta trim. It was supported by a reinforced concrete frame, in order to

make the building as fireproof as possible. The building was designed by Z. Erol Smith, a South Side architect who had considerable experience in the design of commercial buildings throughout the city.

The quarters for the Douglass National Bank and Victory Life Insurance company occupied most of the ground floor, which was emphasized at night by a series of decorative light bulbs studding the terra-cotta string course above the storefronts. Interiors of the bank were finished with white marble applied to walls, counters, and lower parts of the concrete structural columns. A vault and safe deposit facilities also were included.

The second floor was arranged for rental offices, which were considered the finest in Black Metropolis. A few particularly notable tenants were: the Theater Owners Booking Association, which managed and booked African-American stage acts; Chicago's first African-American architect, Walter T. Bailey, who in 1924 designed the Pythian Temple at State Street and 37th Place; and Overton's son-in-law, Dr. Julian H. Lewis, professor of pathology at the University of Chicago. Other tenants included physicians, lawyers, and music publishers.

The third floor was occupied by other of Overton's businesses, while the fourth floor was planned for the manufacturing facilities of Overton Hygienic.

Initially, Overton's carefully managed business ventures weathered the Great Depression fairly well, but three major "runs" on the Douglass National Bank in 1932 resulted in its failure and the near insolvency of the closely allied Victory Life Insurance Company. While he was able to retain control of the Overton Hygienic Company and the *Chicago Bee*, the financial impact of these losses greatly hampered the growth of his other enterprises and forced the abandonment of the Overton Building for more consolidated quarters in the Chicago Bee Building, one block south.

The upper stories of the Overton Hygienic Building are vacant, but retail stores occupy the ground floor. The building is seriously deteriorated.

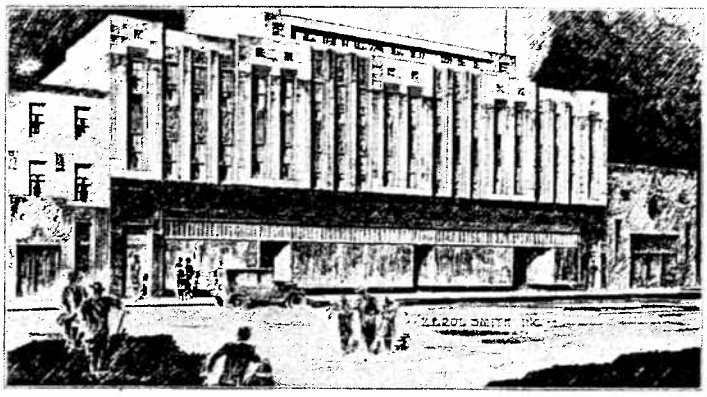
2. CHICAGO BEE BUILDING
3647-55 S. State St.

Date: 1929-31
Architect: Z. Erol Smith

The last major structure built in the State Street commercial district was a combination newspaper office and apartment building, commissioned by Anthony Overton. The *Chicago Bee*, founded in 1926, had been headquartered initially in the Overton Hygienic Building, with a separate printing plant one block south.

Despite increasing competition from the 47th Street commercial district, Overton decided to affirm his confidence in the viability of the State Street commercial

SUNDAY CHICAGO BEE
GREATEST NEGRO NEWSPAPER



The new $200,000 home of the Chicago Bee, now under construction at 3647-51 So. State Street. This new plant is to be provided with every modern equipment and facility

WHAT THE BEE STANDS FOR

The suppression of superstition —with enlightenment. Higher education for all groups. Cordial relation between the races. Civic and racial improvement and development. The promotion of Negro business. Good, wholesome and authentic news, fit for any member of the family.

WHAT THE BEE DOES NOT STAND FOR

The Chicago Sunday Bee will not play up any plan or perpetrate upon its readers and the public any scheme, ostensibly for the public benefit, when at the same time the prime object of such plan or scheme is to gain paid advertisers for this paper, or is in any way or manner ulterior in its aspect.

The Chicago Sunday Bee will not accept fraudulent advertisements: Advertisements dealing with oil well schemes, wild-cat securities, lucky stones, voodooism, or any advertisements that tend to ridicule the Negro or exploit the Public

The Chicago Sunday Bee will not print any front page headlines in red.

The Chicago Sunday Bee denies any man the right to become prominent by committing a crime.

A 1929 advertisement for the Chicago Bee Building, including a statement of how the newspaper differed from other publications of the day.

The street facade of the Chicago Bee Building, shown here is a 1985 photograph, is a colorful essay in Art Deco terra cotta. The ground story is clad in black with gold trim, and the upper two floors in shades of green.

district by constructing a new three-story building that would consolidate the newspaper's operations. Although construction started at the beginning of the Depression, the building was ready for occupancy by 1931.

The Chicago Bee Building is one of the most picturesque of the buildings in the proposed district, and is the only one designed in the Art Deco style of the late 1920s. Designed by Z. Erol Smith, the same architect of the Overton Hygienic Building, the Chicago Bee Building features a richly ornamented facade executed entirely in terra cotta. The ground floor is finished in two shades of green terra cotta with intricate incised ornamentation.

The terra cotta was executed by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company of Chicago, which employed a number of talented French modelers who had mastered the innovative Art Deco forms after having previously worked on the exhibits of the Paris 1925 *Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*.

In addition to the newspaper, the building later housed the offices of the Overton Hygienic Company, following the failure of Overton's Douglass National Bank in 1932. The two ventures shared the building until the early 1940s when the newspaper went out of business.

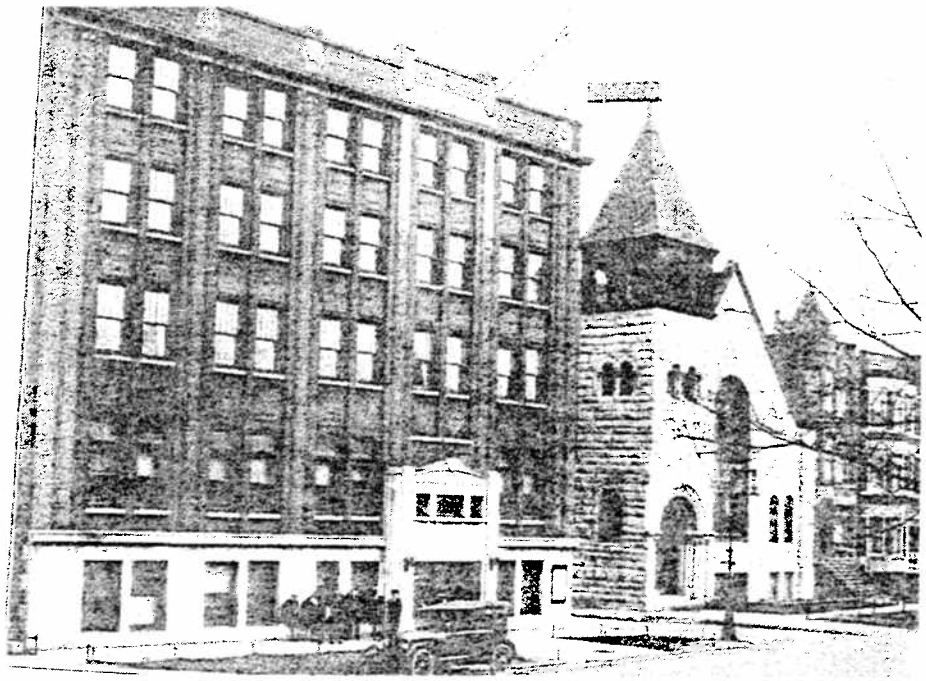
The cosmetics firm continued to occupy the building until the early 1980s. The City of Chicago purchased the building in the mid-1980s for a branch of the Chicago Public Library. The project, which, at this writing, was under construction, will restore the facade which stands largely as originally designed.

3. WABASH AVENUE YMCA
3763 S. Wabash Ave.

Date: 1911-13
Architect: Robert C. Berlin

The Wabash Avenue YMCA opened to the public on June 15, 1913, successfully culminating a three-year fundraising drive. The project was initiated through the efforts of Sears, Roebuck & Company chairman, Julius Rosenwald. Rosenwald's philanthropic support of African-American projects and causes resulted in the construction of several other Young Mens Christian Association buildings across the country, as well as the support of a wide variety of social programs.

In 1911, Rosenwald offered to advance $25,000 toward a combined community center, gymnasium, pool, and residential quarters, to be run under the auspices of the YMCA in the Douglas community. Rosenwald's public offer was soon matched by contributions from many of the city's most prominent businesses and citizens, including N.W. Harris, Cyrus McCormick, Mrs. C.F. Swift, and the



The Wabash Avenue YMCA (left), as it appeared in the 1925 book, "The Souvenir of Negro Progress in Chicago." At right, St. Thomas Episcopal Church (1882-1962).

A 1985 photograph of the Wabash Avenue YMCA.

Pullman Company. Another $20,000 was received in public contributions from within the Douglas community.

The completed YMCA was an imposing five-story structure fronted in dark pressed brick with Bedford limestone trim and designed by Chicago architect Robert C. Berlin. Berlin had previously served as architect for other YMCA projects. The building was of concrete frame construction and was one of the best equipped structures of its type at the time of its opening.

The timing of the Wabash Avenue YMCA's opening was auspicious, for it soon became one of the major centers in assisting incoming arrivals from the South during the Great Migration. The center offered comprehensive programs for finding housing and employment.

People arriving with no friends or contacts to guide them found a warm welcome at the Wabash Avenue YMCA, where the building's 102 rooms were often filled to capacity by newcomers who stayed until permanent accommodations could be found. The "Y" also conducted extensive job training programs, which benefitted established neighborhood residents as well as the new arrivals. One of the most popular programs was the auto repair class.

The Wabash Avenue YMCA also was an important part of community life in Black Metropolis. Its large assembly hall was used for a wide variety of civic meetings and community functions, and the gymnasium and pool offered a pleasant diversion for young and old alike. Its educational and social programs became a staple of neighborhood activities, making the Wabash YMCA one of the most heavily utilized public facilities of Chicago's African-American community.

A notable aspect of the YMCA's diverse history was the founding in 1915 of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History by Carter G. Woodson. As publishers of the magazine, *Journal of Negro History*, and other efforts to document African-American history, the association became one of the first groups devoted to African-American studies.

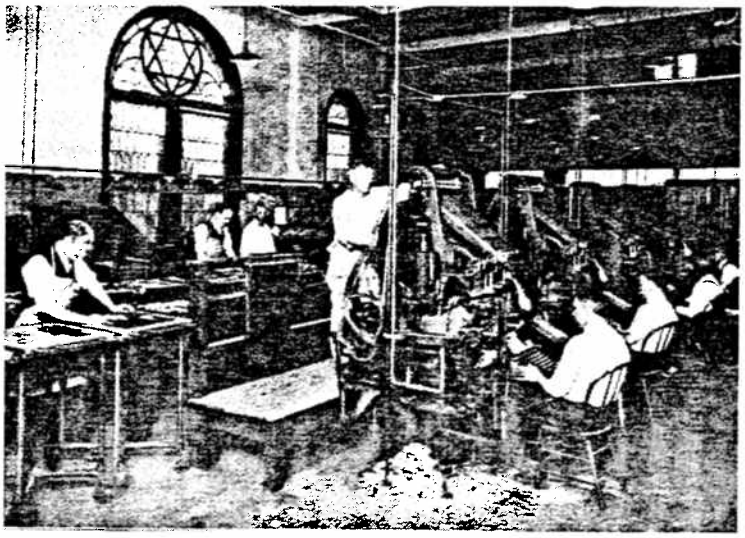
The building was expanded to the south in 1945, following the design of the original structure. The Wabash Avenue YMCA continued to be an important part of the Douglas community until the late 1970s, when the national YMCA office closed it. The now-vacant building recently has been targeted for rehabilitation under the auspices of a local church that holds title to the property.

4. CHICAGO DEFENDER BUILDING
3435 S. Indiana Ave.

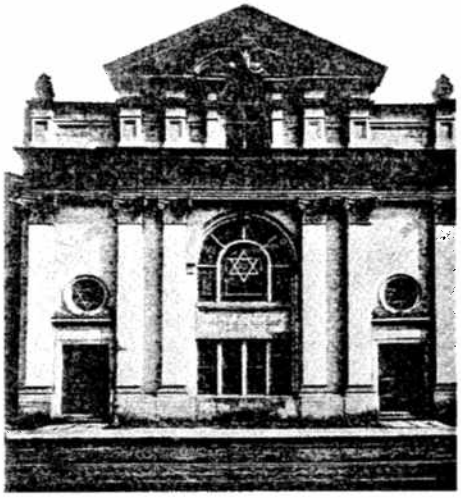
Date: 1899
Architect: Henry Newhouse

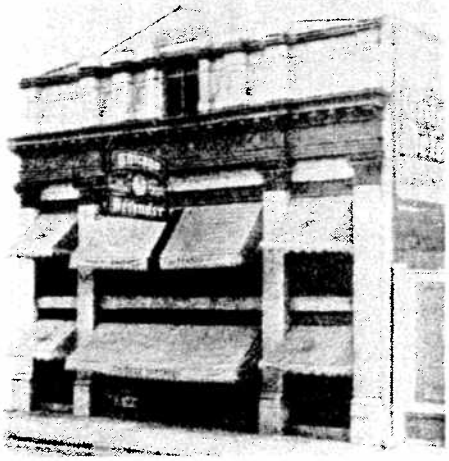
From 1920 until 1960, this former Jewish synagogue was the home of the *Chicago Defender*, one of the most influential African-American publications of the 20th century. From its modest beginnings in 1905, the *Defender* rapidly developed into one of the country's premier forums of African-American journalism, with its circulation and influence extending nationwide.

Under the shrewd guidance of its founder, Robert S. Abbott (1870-1940; see page 29), the *Defender* distinguished itself from its competitors by combining local and national news reporting with outspoken editorial policies championing a wide spectrum of civil rights issues. The phenomenal growth and popularity of the *Defender* was also due in large part to the creative journalistic abilities of



Robert S. Abbott (right), founder of the Chicago Defender. The newspaper's offices for 40 years were at 3435 S. Indiana, a converted synagogue (note original window in 1925 photo, at left).





Built in 1899 for the South Side Hebrew Congregation (top), the building was the home of the Chicago Defender (middle) from 1920 to 1960. Bottom: the building as it appeared in 1984.

J. Hockley Smiley, who--as Abbott's assistant from 1910 until his death in 1915--did much to develop the paper into a major force in African-American journalism. In fact, the Great Migration was initiated almost exclusively by Abbott's editorials urging African-Americans to leave the oppression and poverty of the South for new opportunities in the North.

Although the *Defender* had sufficient facilities for its growing editorial and circulation functions during the paper's first 15 years of operation, all of its linotype and printing operations were handled by outside firms. Abbott sought to establish his own printing plant after his regular white-owned printing firm refused to print the paper following the 1919 race riots.

In 1920, Abbott purchased a three-story building at 3435 S. Indiana Ave. that was to remain the headquarters of the *Chicago Defender* until 1960. Originally built in 1899 as the synagogue of the South Side Hebrew Congregation, it was altered for warehouse use after the congregation left in 1915.

The offices of the paper were located in a three-story portion at the front, while the printing and linotype operations occupied the synagogue's auditorium at the rear. Frequent additions and alterations were made to expand the pressroom due to increased demand for the paper, and the offices were later expanded to include a two-story residence to the north that has since been demolished. The building facade's original sheet-metal cornice and decorative pilasters were also removed by the *Defender* when offices were installed in the building's former attic space.

After Abbott's death in 1940, the paper's management was assumed by his nephew, Robert Sengstacke, who turned it into a daily publication in 1958. Two years later, the *Chicago Daily Defender* vacated its Indiana Avenue headquarters for larger quarters in the former Illinois Automobile Club Building at 2400 S. Michigan Ave.

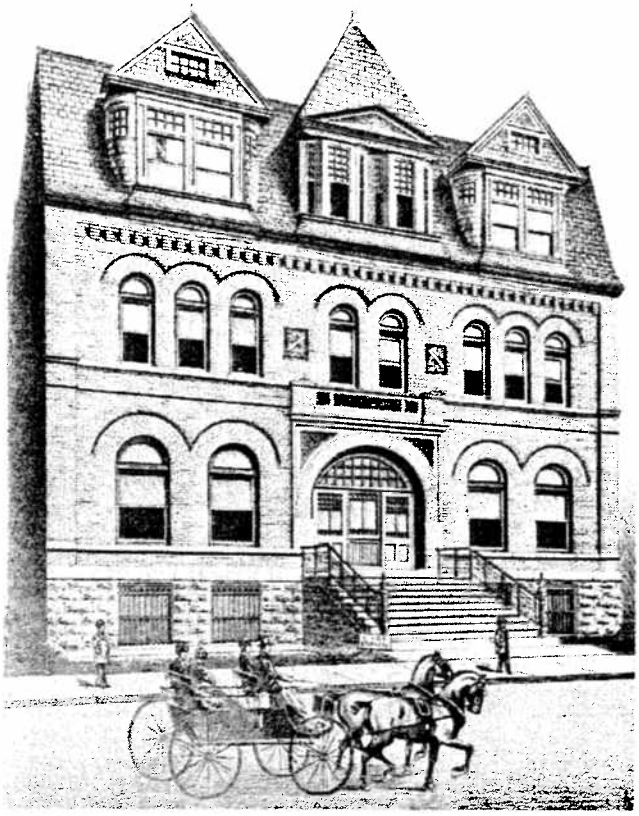
The exterior of the Indiana Avenue building still remains largely as it looked when it was occupied by the *Chicago Defender*. The only major alteration being the installation of new aluminum storefronts at the ground level.

5. UNITY HALL
(originally the Lakeside Club)
3140 S. Indiana Ave.

Date: 1887
Architect: L.B. Dixon

Unity Hall was originally built as the Lakeside Club, a Jewish social organization. Beginning in 1917, it became the headquarters of the Peoples Movement Club, a political organization headed by Oscar Stanton DePriest (1871-1951), the first African-American elected to the Chicago City Council and the first northern African-American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. (See page 33.)

The building was designed by L.B. Dixon, an



Originally built in 1887 for the Lakeside Club, a Jewish social organization, Unity Hall was later the center of African-American political activity and served at different times as headquarters for Oscar DePriest and William L. Dawson.

architect who lived in the area and was responsible for the design of many residences in the Douglas community. Faced in red pressed brick with terra-cotta and sheet metal trim, it is an excellent example of the type of buildings found in the community in the 1880s. Its interior included numerous small clubrooms at the front of the building and a large assembly hall in the rear.

In 1917, two years after Oscar DePriest was elected to the City Council, he established the Peoples Movement Club and moved it into the Lakeside Club building at 3140 S. Indiana. In addition to serving as that club's headquarters, the now-renamed Unity Hall also served for many years as the headquarters for William Dawson, a prominent Democratic political leader of long standing.

Since sometime after World War II, the building has been occupied by a church. The building remains largely as originally designed, except for its painted exterior masonry and the alterations to the doorway and front porch.

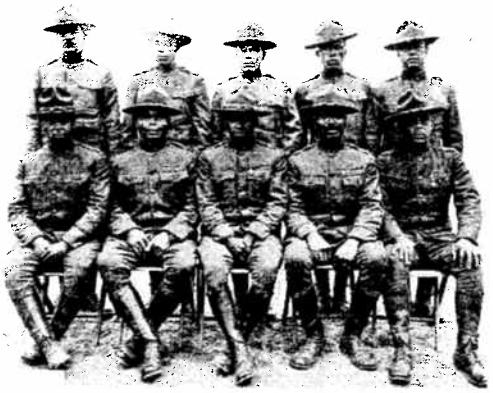
Now a church, the Unity Hall building's appearance today remains largely as it did when built. This photo was taken in 1985.

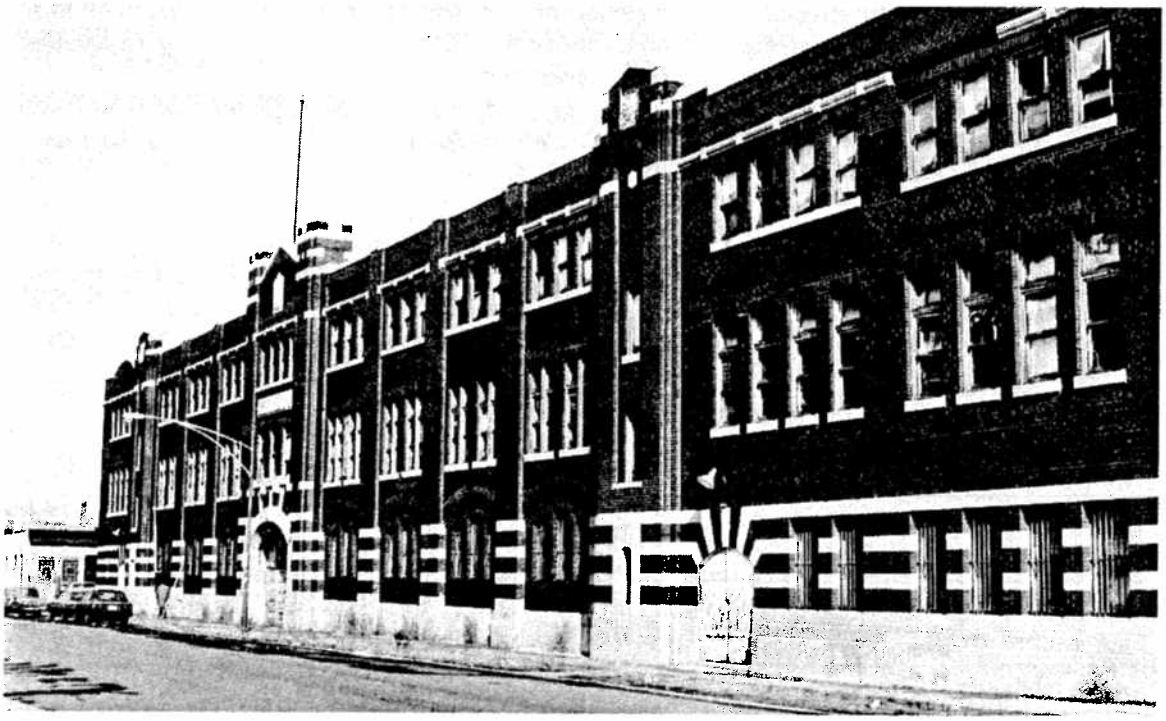
6. EIGHTH REGIMENT ARMORY
3533 S. Giles Ave.

Date: 1914-15
Architect: J.B. Dibelka

At the time of its completion, the Eighth Regiment Armory was the only armory in the United States built for an African-American regiment. The "Fighting 8th," which was commanded entirely by African-Americans, was organized in 1898 as a volunteer regiment drawn from the African-American community during the Spanish-American War. It later was established as an infantry division of the Illinois National Guard.

The Eighth Regiment headquarters originally were located in a former stable at the corner of 35th Street and Forest Avenue. When those accommodations proved to be inadequate for military purposes, petitions were circulated in the state legislature for a new armory building. Construction was started late in 1914, and the $250,000 building was largely completed by the following year.





The Eighth Regiment Armory, now vacant, as it appeared in 1985. It was the headquarters of the "Fighting 8th" regiment, which during World War I was part of the 370th U.S. Infantry. The officers of the 370th are pictured above.

The armory was designed by James B. Dibelka, a Chicagoan who was chief architect for the State of Illinois. The building gives an imposing appearance of strength and monumentality through the detailing of its brown pressed-brick and Bedford limestone facade. Yet, at the same time, it manages to be visually compatible with the residential buildings which surrounded it.

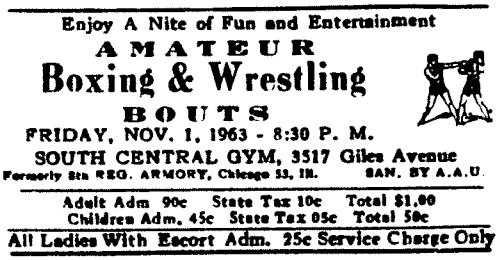
The principal room of the building was the massive drill hall, whose roof trusses clear-span nearly the full depth of the building. The rest of the building was planned for the varied offices and functions of the regiment, including a banquet hall, two reception halls, a dining room with full kitchen facilities, and a bowling alley. The building, which also was intended to be available for community use, was the site of numerous neighborhood meetings and social functions. Among the notable events was a controversial speech and rally in 1919 by Marcus Garvey, founder of the United Negro Improvement Association.

Under the command of Col. Franklin A. Denison, a former Assistant Attorney General of the State of Illinois, the Eighth Regiment saw service during border conflicts with Mexico in 1916, and in France during World War I when it was incorporated into the 370th U.S. Infantry. The "Fighting 8th" gained special note as the regiment that finally drove the German forces from the Aisne-Marne region prior to the Armistice in 1918.

Upon their return, the regiment's members were hailed for their brave and meritorious service, as nearly every man who returned carried some kind of decoration for valor in action. Special honor was paid to the 144 members who never returned home, and a plaque was installed on the exterior of the Armory listing their names and ranks. In honor of Lt. George R. Giles, the regiment's highest ranking officer to be killed in action, the name of the street on which the Armory was located was changed by the City Council in 1922 from Forest Avenue to Giles Avenue.

The "Fighting 8th" and its successors eventually incorporated into several specialized military divisions. The building continued to be used for military purposes, including World War II activities, through the early 1960s, when the building's functions were consolidated into a new armory at 5200 S. Cottage Grove Ave.

The historic Eighth Regiment Armory Building still stands largely as originally designed, although it is currently vacant. Several proposals have been offered for the rehabilitation of the building for productive new use.


Enjoy A Nite of Fun and Entertainment

AMATEUR

Boxing & Wrestling

BOUTS

FRIDAY, NOV. 1, 1963 - 8:30 P. M.

SOUTH CENTRAL GYM, 3517 Giles Avenue

Formerly 8th REG. ARMORY, Chicago 53, Ill. SAN. BY A.A.U.

Adult Adm 90c State Tax 10c Total $1.00

Children Adm. 45c State Tax 05c Total 50c

All Ladies With Escort Adm. 25c Service Charge Only

After the Illinois National Guard left in the early 1960s, the armory was used as a gymnasium, as this 1963 advertisement suggests.

7.SUNSET CAFE/ GRAND TERRACE CAFE

(now Meyer's Hardware)

315 E. 35th St.

Date: 1909; 1921; 1937
Architects: Alfred Schartz, 1921; Sobel & Drielsma, 1937

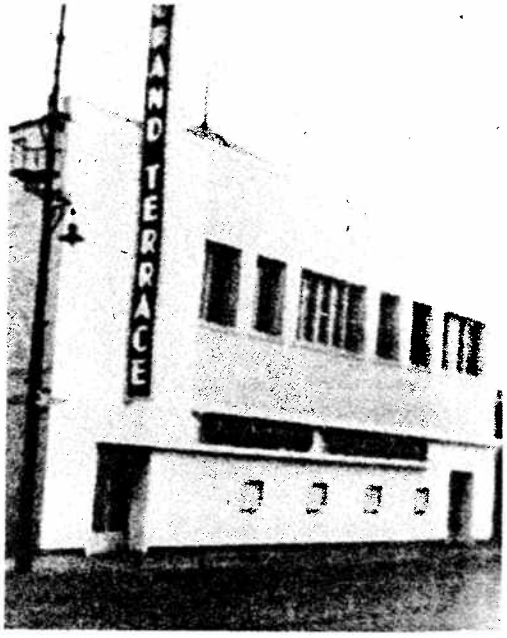
This building is the premier remaining structure associated with the nightclubs that established Chicago's reputation as a jazz center in the 1920s and 30s. The Sunset Cafe was home to such legendary figures as Louis Armstrong and Johnny Dodds. Later, as the Grand Terrace Cafe, it was the home of Fletcher Henderson, Earl Hines, and the Grand Terrace Orchestra.

Unlike Black Metropolis' daytime businesses, its nightclubs were largely controlled by white entrepreneurs. The clubs, which catered to both an African-American and white clientele, were established throughout the area, principally along 35th Street and South State Street.

This building was built in 1909 as a one-story automobile repair and storage garage. In 1921, a second story was added and the interior remodeled for the Sunset Cafe, a jazz club operated by real estate speculator Samuel Rifas and saloon owner Edward Fox.

The Sunset Cafe quickly gained a reputation for engaging the city's best performers, and became one of the prime locations to hear the "Chicago sound." Performances were accompanied by floor shows that introduced the latest dances to Chicago audiences. For many years, the Carroll Dickerson Sunset Syncopated Orchestra served as the house band, often accompanied by Louis Armstrong on the trumpet and Earl "Fatha" Hines on the piano. Many promising young artists, such as Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Bix Beiderbecke, and Jimmy Dorsey got their start at late-night sessions there.

In 1937, the building was remodeled for the Grand Terrace Cafe, a popular club--also controlled by Edward Fox--that had been located at 3955 South Park Ave. A new Moderne-style stucco exterior and elaborately painted interiors, including a still-extant mural depicting musical themes, were installed. The club operated until 1950. In the 1950s, the building housed the office of the Second Ward Regular Democratic Organization. It was later remodeled as a hardware store, a function that continues today.



Photographs of the Grand Terrace Cafe, after its remodeling in 1937 (top), and its appearance today.

8. VICTORY MONUMENT
35th St. and King Dr.

Date: 1926 and 1936
Sculptor: Leonard Crunelle
Architect: John A. Nyden

At the close of World War I, movements began within Chicago's African-American community to honor the valorous achievements of the Eighth Regiment of the Illinois National Guard, which served in France under the 370th U.S. Infantry.

In the mid-1920s, proposals for the erection of a permanent monument in the parkway of Grand Boulevard (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive) were met with stiff opposition by the South Park Commission, which controlled the southern portion of the boulevard system at that time. The Commission originally had said there was not enough available space for a monument, but it relented after the *Chicago Defender* began actively promoting a "Vote No" campaign that urged readers to defeat any project backed by the South Park Commission until due recognition of the community's war heroes was realized.

Construction of the monument was funded jointly by the South Park Commission and the State of Illinois. It was installed immediately south of that intersection within the center median of Grand Boulevard, where it still stands today.

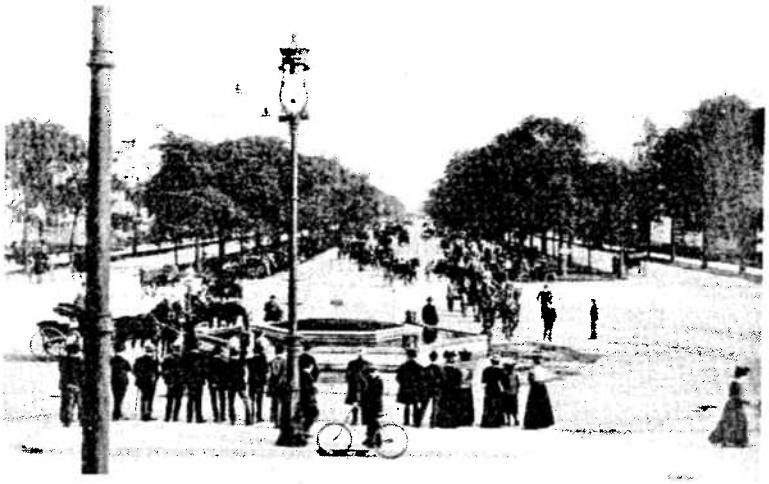
The basic design for the monument, prepared by Chicago architect John A. Nyden in 1926, consisted of a circular grey granite shaft with three inset bronze sculptural panels finished with a rich black patination. The panels portrayed an African-American soldier, an African-American woman (symbolizing motherhood), and the figure of "Columbia" holding a tablet that recorded the locations of the regiment's principal battles.

The panels were designed and executed by French-born sculptor Leonard Crunelle (1872-1944), a former pupil of noted Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft. The base and architectural setting of the monument were a collaborative effort between Crunelle and Nyden. The monument was dedicated on Armistice Day, November 11, 1928, in an extensive public ceremony. The sculpture of a uniformed World War I African-American soldier was added to the top of the monument in 1936, and was also the work of Leonard Crunelle.

The monument is one of the most famous land-

The Victory Monument commemorates the Eighth Regiment, which served in France during World War I.

marks of Chicago's African-American community and is the site of an annual Memorial Day ceremony, when the surviving members of the "Fighting 8th" gather to honor the memory of their fallen comrades.



Bottom: A 1927 newspaper photo shows sculptor Leonard Crunelle working on the front panel of the Victory Monument. His model is 8th Regiment Sgt. Ozzie Levels. Top: Looking south on King Drive from 35th Street, c.1900, when a fountain still stood in the intersection. The future site of the Victory Monument is in the center background.

9. LIBERTY LIFE/ SUPREME LIFE INSURANCE CO.

3501 S. King Dr.

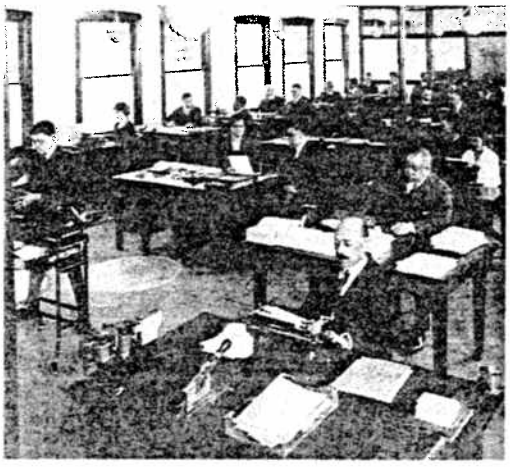
Date: 1921
Architect: Albert Anis
Altered: 1950

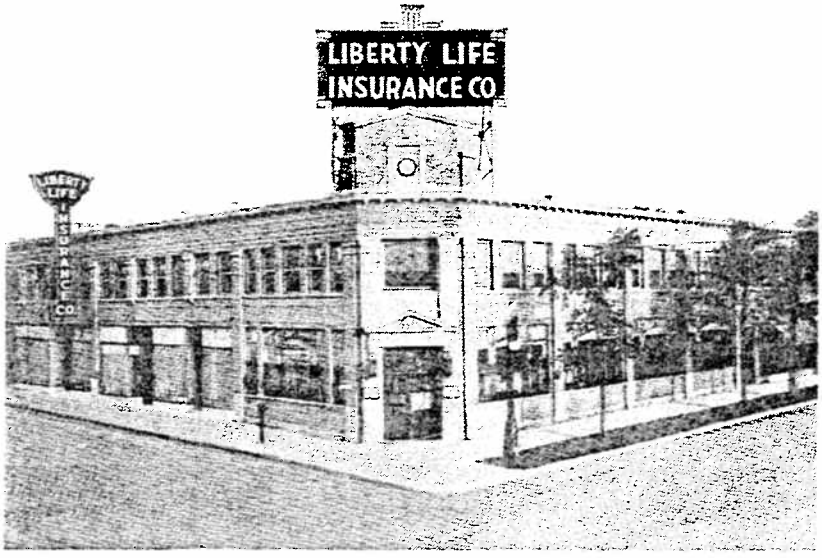
One of the most significant business ventures of Black Metropolis was the Liberty Life Insurance Company. Established in 1919, it was the first African-American-owned and operated insurance company in the northern United States.

With the exception of "industrial group" policies, comprehensive life insurance protection for African-Americans in Chicago and the northern U.S. had been largely non-existent. Recognizing the need and demand for adequate, reasonably priced life insurance services, Liberty Life was incorporated on June 30, 1919, largely through the efforts of Frank L. Gillespie (1876-1925; see page 34).

The $100,000 deposit required to begin operations was raised by 1921, and the firm began writing policies in the summer of that year. The firm's success more than justified Gillespie's hopes and expectations. By 1925, it had written over $5 million in policies and had opened branch offices in Michigan, Kentucky, Missouri, and Washington, D.C.

The Liberty Life offices were set up in a storefront and part of the second floor of the Roosevelt State Bank





The offices of Liberty Life (above) were originally located in rental space in the Roosevelt State Bank Building. The company bought the building three years later.

Building, a newly built, two-story, classical-styled structure located at the southeast corner of 35th Street and Grand Boulevard (now King Drive). However, the insurance company's business volume grew so rapidly that it bought the building outright in 1924, eventually taking over the entire structure for its offices. Following Gillespie's death in 1925, the success of the firm continued. Its financial resources were expanded in 1929 by its merger with two out-of-state firms to form the Supreme Life Insurance Company of America.

Despite poor business conditions brought on by the Depression, the management of Supreme Life kept the firm on solid footing; in fact, it was one of the few major businesses of Black Metropolis to survive. In the years following the Depression, the firm regained its full financial position, and remained in business until 1992.

As early as 1925, Liberty Life had proposed replacing its headquarters building with a new $5 million skyscraper. Although that never occurred, the company did expand the building to the southeast, and later absorbed a group of nineteenth-century townhouses to the south.

In 1950, the buildings were remodeled on both the interior and exterior, resulting in their present appearance. The classical stone facade was stripped off and reclad with porcelain-coated metal panels, leaving little visual evidence of the original building other than its general shape and proportion. Interiors were remodeled with hardwood paneling and metal, but the original decorative ceiling of the first floor still survives above a dropped ceiling.

Although it was remodeled in 1950, the Liberty Life/Supreme Life Building remains a familiar and symbolic landmark at the corner of 35th Street and King Drive.

Many famous people were associated with the Black Metropolis community during its heyday (1900-30). Some are profiled in the following chapter; among the others are:

▸ *Above*: **Andrew "Rube" Foster** (1879-1930), a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, founder of the Negro National League, and owner of the Chicago American Giants, who played at 39th and Wentworth.

▸ *Right, top*: **Ida B. Wells** (1862-1931), a civil rights activist, journalist, and organizer of the NAACP who lived at 3624 S. King Drive, itself a National Historic Landmark.

▸ *Right, middle*: **Bessie Coleman** (1892-1926), the first African-American woman pilot, who won fame for her flying demonstrations; a road at O'Hare Airport is named in her honor.

▸ *Right, bottom*: **Louis Armstrong** (1900-71), an influential trumpet player and bandleader who lived and performed in Chicago throughout the 1920s, before moving to New York where he earned international acclaim.

Chapter Three:
Biographical Sketches

Many different individuals contributed to the development of Black Metropolis. Following are brief profiles of some of those people.

Robert S. Abbott (1870-1940)

Robert S. Abbott, the founder of the *Chicago Defender* and the son of slaves, was a native of coastal Georgia who learned the printing trade at Hampton (Virginia) Institute. He moved to Chicago in 1897, where he continued to work in the printing industry while obtaining a law degree (1899) at Kent College of Law.

Undaunted by the existence of several African American-oriented newspapers in Chicago, Abbott decided to start his own newspaper. In

Chicago Defender founder and publisher Robert Abbott in his newspaper office, c.1925.

1905, with a reported capital of 25 cents, he launched the *Defender*. A weekly paper, its initial print run was 300 copies. Its office consisted of a one-room apartment at 3159 S. State St., which was furnished with a borrowed kitchen chair and folding table.

From those modest beginnings, Abbott built the *Defender* into one of the nation's most influential African-American publications. The success of the self-proclaimed "World's Greatest Weekly" was largely the result of Abbott's policy of aggressively addressing issues of common concerns to African-Americans, including civil rights, economic development, and race pride. As he constantly admonished his employees: "Elevation of the race is our job."

The *Defender* grew to national prominence as the result of its campaigns urging African-Americans to leave the oppression and poverty of the South for new opportunities in the North. By 1916, the paper's national circulation had reached 50,000, with distribution in 71 towns; two years later, circulation had grown to 125,000. In addition to regional sales representatives, Abbott hired railroad porters and waiters to help distribute the paper.

The paper's success made Abbott one of the nation's first African-American millionaires. He also inspired a generation of young writers, including a former employee, novelist Willard Motley ("Knock on Any Door"), Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks, and the million youngsters who were members of the paper's Bud Billiken Club, named after a section of the paper aimed at young readers. In 1929, Abbott initiated the annual Bud Billiken Day Parade, which has attracted such notable participants as prizefighter Joe Louis, singer-actress Lena Horne, and Olympic sprinter Jesse Owens.

Abbott died in 1940. His house at 4742 S. King Dr. is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Jesse Binga (1865-1950)

Jesse Binga's pioneering ventures in banking and real estate in the early 1900s set important precedents for subsequent economic development within the African-American community.

Born in 1865, in Detroit, Binga grew up in a business-oriented environment. His father owned a barbershop and his mother had an active interest in real estate and other business ventures. It was his mother, Adelphia, who had the stronger influence on her son's career. Binga

studied law for two years while he managed several properties established for him by his mother.

Despite his promising career there, Binga left in 1885 for an extended tour of the West, where he supported himself in various odd jobs. With the profits from a successful real estate investment, he financed his move to Chicago in 1896. With only $10, it was reported, Binga established a real estate business in a former apartment at 3331 S. State Street. He built up his business by acquiring leases on run-down properties which he then improved by doing the necessary repairs and maintenance himself. With the increased rents he got from the improved properties, Binga was able to buy the properties outright and soon amassed considerable holdings.

Using some of the proceeds from his real estate profits, Binga established a private bank in 1908. Binga's bank experienced its greatest growth during the Great Migration, when he sought to instill greater trust in his bank by reorganizing it under the protection of a state charter. The goals of the reorganized institution were expressed in an April 1920, *Chicago Defender* article:

> *Never could a corporation be given to the public at a more opportune time...An undercurrent of forces at play here and there in the city is gradually forcing the people of the great south side into an insolvable mass, which is to result in inestimable financial strength and economic resources. Business is springing on every hand and commercial opportunity is smiling. People are spending money, people are saving money, people are investing money as never before in the history of the Race. We see them standing in line supporting banks, real estate brokers, doctors, dentists, crowding the markets...The Binga State Bank arrives at a time when it can be of unlimited assistance to such a public in such times.*

The Binga State Bank officially opened on January 3, 1921, occupying the same quarters as the private bank. Binga's professional and social stature within Black Metropolis continued to grow throughout the 1920s, and his role as an example of self-made financial success prompted him to prepare a pamphlet, "Certain Sayings of Jesse Binga," containing such homilies as:

> *Get a competency. Then the world--white or colored--will concede that you are competent.*
>
> *Only business contacts with the community as a whole--white and colored--will educate the colored man in business.*

Jesse Binga, age 60, at the height of his business career in banking and real estate.

Nothing is so easy or so wasteful as the work of hating--except hating work. And that goes for races as well as individuals.

Binga's achievements attracted considerable attention in both the African-American and white press of the time, gaining for his institution limited support from the established banking community (as evidenced by its membership in the influential Chicago Clearing House Association). Binga also gained considerable unwanted attention when he purchased a home at 5922 South Park Ave. (now King Drive). The house was bombed five separate times in unsuccessful attempts by angry white residents to make him leave the neighborhood.

The former residence of Jesse Binga, at 5922 S. King Dr., is one of the few surviving buildings associated with Binga's life.

The Binga State Bank weathered the Great Depression until 1930, when it was forced out of business. The reasons for failure were complex, owing to the devastating effects of the Depression and the swift depreciation in value of the extensive real estate that constituted the bank's financial base. Bank examiners also revealed irregularities, prompting them to state that the bank had been operated in an "illegal, fraudulent, and unsafe manner." As a result, Binga was arrested and convicted for embezzlement; he began serving his a 10-year sentence in 1935.

Despite his mismanagement of the bank, considerable support was generated to obtain his official pardon in recognition of his important contributions to the African-American community. Supporters, including famed trial lawyer Clarence Darrow and even some of Binga's former enemies, banded together to circulate petitions for his release. In 1938, their efforts were successful. Binga was released into the custody of Father Eckert of St. Anselm's Church, who gave the 73-year-old former entrepreneur a $15-a-week job as a church handyman and usher. A broken man, Binga spent his last years in obscurity and died with little public notice on June 13, 1950.

Although over 40 years have passed since Binga's death, his career still remains controversial, spurred by the bitterness of families whose finances were swept away with the collapse of the bank and by the criticism of businessmen who felt that the collapse was due to inexcusable financial manipulation and dishonest practices. Many others, however, believe that Binga's practices were unfortunate necessities that were required to succeed against the crushing competition and prejudices of the white business community. Despite these conflicting views, there is no question that his achievements formed the cornerstone of what was once Chicago's thriving, self-supporting Black Metropolis.

Oscar S. DePriest (1871-1951)

Oscar Stanton DePriest was born in 1871 in Florence, Alabama. He came to Chicago in 1889, where he subsequently established a construction and painting business. From the time of his arrival, DePriest was deeply interested in the city's political structure; his involvement resulted in his election to the Cook County Board in 1904.

As the city's African-American population boomed during the first decade of the century, a movement grew to establish the community's representation in municipal government. DePriest formed careful alliances with the white Republican political bosses who controlled the Black Metropolis wards, thereby broadening his political support.

His aspirations for African-American representation in the City Council were realized in 1915, when he defeated three African-American and five white candidates in the Republican primary for Second Ward alderman. It was the combined support of the community and the white Republican party bosses that enabled him to be the first African-American elected to the Chicago City Council.

Oscar DePriest

Upon being elected, DePriest declared his intention to establish a new political organization for Black Metropolis, one based on support from within the African-American community. Two years later, in 1917, the Peoples Movement Club was inaugurated and moved into the Unity Hall building at 3140 S. Indiana Ave.

DePriest took an active role in attending to the needs of his constituents. One of his most controversial acts was introducing an ordinance in 1916 to revoke the business license of any establishment that discriminated on the basis of race. The ordinance met with vigorous opposition and was dropped from further consideration.

Due to the aftermath of an unsuccessful attempt by some of DePriest's political opponents to disgrace him by bringing bribery charges against him (of which he was fully acquitted), DePriest did not seek reelection to his aldermanic post in 1917.

His political influence, however, remained strong. His Peoples Movement Club was one of the most well-organized political groups in the area for years to come. In 1924, DePriest became the Republican Third Ward Committeeman. In 1928, he became the first African-American from the North to be elected to the U. S. House of Representatives, where he served for three consecutive terms. He died in 1951. His home at 4536 S. King Dr. is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Frank L. Gillespie (1876-1925)

Gillespie's background gives little indication of his future success in the insurance business. Born in Osceola, Arkansas, in 1876, he attended the Boston Conservatory of Music, where he showed promise as a violinist. He came to Chicago around the turn of the century.

He initially worked for a telephone manufacturing company, before becoming an agent for Oscar DePriest's real estate firm. He later became an agent at the Royal Life Insurance Company of Illinois, a white-owned firm that dealt in industrial group policies for African-Americans.

Most large insurance companies of the time refused to offer policies to African-Americans, considering them a bad risk because of their higher mortality statistics. Royal Life was the first insurance company in Chicago to hire African-Americans as executives, and its South Side district office was completely staffed by African-Americans.

Frank Gillespie

Although Gillespie quickly advanced within Royal Life, reaching the position of district superintendent, he dreamed of starting a company of his own. He spent years organizing many of the most influential citizens of Black Metropolis to back an independent African American-owned and operated life insurance company. For additional financial backing, Gillespie actively solicited the African-American community to invest in Liberty Life stock, taking out large advertisements in the *Chicago Defender* and other publications of the period. As one ad proclaimed:

> *If we ever expect to get anywhere as a race of people we must first learn to stick together....The day of Negro enterprises of every kind has arrived.*

Finally, in 1919, the Liberty Life Insurance Company was incorporated. Gillespie remained its president until his death in 1925, by which time Liberty Life had attracted more than 3,000 stockholders, $5 million in policies, and 700 agents and employees. It was one of the few African-American insurance companies to survive the Great Depression, later evolving into the Supreme Life Insurance Company.

Joseph J. Jordan (1882-1971)

Joseph J. Jordan was instrumental in the development of Black Metropolis, using the money he acquired from his song writing and music publishing interests to finance the Jordan Building (built 1917; demolished 1985) and several other ventures in Chicago real estate.

Born in Cincinnati in 1882, Jordan showed great musical ability at an early age, with proficiency on the violin, piano, and drums. While in his teens, Jordan moved to St. Louis where he met such notable ragtime composers as Scott Joplin, Louis Chauvin, and Charles Hunter. It was there that Jordan became a ragtime composer and songwriter and where he collaborated on the writing and promotion of several stage shows.

As a side enterprise to his job as music director at Mott's Pekin Theater (2700 S. State St.), Jordan organized the Pekin Publishing Company, which provided music publishing and copyright protection for Chicago's vast African-American musical talent. Among the works it published were several of Jordan's own compositions, including "Pekin Rag" (1904), "J.J.J. Rag" (1905), "Oh Liza Lady" (1908), and "Dixie Land" (1908).

The importance of copyright protection was especially important due to the frequency of music theft by white jazz bands who were "inspired" by visits to the African-American jazz clubs. Jordan established a strong precedent against this practice in 1917 when he successfully brought suit against the white Original Dixieland Jazz Band. The band had appropriated his copyrighted 1909

Joseph Jordan, one of the most notable music composers--and early developers--of Black Metropolis.

work, "That Teasin' Rag" as a part of its "Dixie Jazz Band One-Step," a recording that is frequently attributed to be the first popular jazz record.

Jordan's greatest financial success came with his composition of the hit song "Lovie Joe." Fannie Brice introduced it in her first featured billing in the 1910 Ziegfeld Follies. Jordan had further success in the production of and collaboration on several hit stage shows, including "Red Moon," a production that made significant advances in freeing African-American shows from the degradation of accepted minstrel traditions.

After leaving Chicago in 1918 following a series of triumphs in music as well as real estate speculation, Jordan continued his diverse ventures. He is reported to have made, lost, and regained at least four separate fortunes. Among his post-Chicago activities were the 1919 assistant directorship of Will Marion Cook's New York Syncopated Orchestra, and his work during the 1930s as conductor for the Negro Unit Orchestra of the Federal Theater Project, where he conducted for Orson Welles' production of "Macbeth."

Jordan later moved to Tacoma, Washington, where he was in the real-estate business as late as the 1960s. He died in 1971.

Anthony Overton (1865-1947)

Anthony Overton was born into slavery in 1865, at Monroe, Louisiana. He was educated at Washburn College and at the University of Kansas, where he received a law degree in 1888. He later served as a municipal court judge in Kansas.

After a brief venture as a store proprietor in Oklahoma, Overton moved to Kansas City where, in 1898, he established the Overton Hygienic Company. In need of a larger market for his products, Overton moved the company to Chicago in 1922. There he set up his home and factory in a former apartment building at 5200 South Wabash Ave.

Through comprehensive advertising programs and home agent solicitation, the firm rapidly became one of the nation's foremost producers of African-American cosmetics, with sales distribution extending as far as Egypt, Liberia, and Japan. Overton Hygienic products were marked by quality and high ethical standards, as evidenced by Overton's steadfast refusal to manufacture

degrading products such as skin bleaches which were advertised then in much of the African-American press.

Building on public confidence in the Overton Hygienic Company, Overton launched *The Half Century Magazine* in 1916. The magazine included African-American fiction, news reports, homemaking features, and essays on the problems of succeeding in business. Overton phased out the magazine in 1926 when he established a newspaper, the *Chicago Bee*, to take on the *Chicago Defender*. Similarly, Overton broke into the fledgling African-American insurance market through his establishment of the Victory Life Insurance Company.

However, one of Overton's proudest achievements was the establishment of the Douglass National Bank in 1922. Prior to that, the banks in Black Metropolis had been either white-owned or small, privately-owned ventures which, although financed by African-Americans, lacked the safeguards of a state or national charter.

In the January, 1919 issue of *The Half Century Magazine*, Overton expressed the need for a African-American-owned bank under the protection of state or national supervision:

> *The most deplorable condition of all is that many of our people...have large funds on deposit in white banks in which not only the said banking institutions would refuse to give any of our people employment or make them loans, but what is worse, these same Negro funds are loaned to white business institutions, that likewise would not give employment to any of our race...The Negro's money is used to close the door of opportunity in his own face.*

Two years later, Jesse Binga reorganized his privately-owned bank to operate under state charter. The following year, Overton established the Douglass National Bank. Both operated successfully in healthy competition until they were destroyed by the Great Depression in the early 1930s.

Overton's interests prospered throughout the 1920s, and he was honored with two awards for his advancement of African-American business: the Springarn Medal in 1927 and the Harmon Business Award in 1928. He retained control of the Overton Hygienic Company until his death in 1946.

The importance of Overton's career was noted in an obituary in the July, 1947 *Journal of Negro History*: "He will long be remembered among the first of those Negro business men who endeavored to lead the way onward for the quarter of a million Negroes in Chicago."

Anthony Overton

Chapter Four:
Criteria for Designation

Designation of the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District is recommended because it meets three of the criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 2-120-620 of the Chicago Municipal Code.

CRITERION 1

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, social, or other historical aspect of the heritage of Chicago, Illinois, or the United States.

The buildings comprising the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District are the most representative and tangible elements of an important era in African-American history in Chicago. Beginning around 1910, African-Americans began to finance and build commercial and institutional structures in the area centered at State and 35th streets.

These undertakings were a reaction to the pattern of segregation that discouraged the city's growing African-American community from doing business with white-owned companies. As a result, a "city-within-a-city" was created that operated in this area from 1910 to 1925. Nicknamed "the Metropolis" and highlighted in the definitive study, *Black Metropolis*, the area was the center of the city's African-American social, economic, and cultural life.

Within the area were: the Binga Bank (since demolished), the first bank owned and operated by African-Americans; the Supreme Life Insurance Building, the first African American-owned insurance company in the North; the Eighth Regiment Armory, the first such building to be constructed for an African-American military unit; and many other important institutions. The district, in clubs such as the Sunset Cafe, also drew the most important figures in jazz.

Unfortunately, the area's prosperity halted in the 1930s with the Great Depression. The area declined through the 1950s when urban renewal efforts accelerated the abandonment. Despite the loss of a number of buildings housing important

businesses, the remaining structures convey the vital link with the city's early African-American history.

CRITERION 3

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social or other aspect of the development of Chicago, Illinois, or the United States.

The Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District is associated with many prominent African Americans, including banker Jesse Binga, entrepreneur Anthony Overton, newspaper publisher Robert S. Abbott (*Chicago Defender*), and Frank L. Gillespie, founder of the first African American-owned insurance company in the North (Liberty Life/Supreme Life). Musicians King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Earl "Fatha" Hines, all of whom are internationally recognized, lived and performed in Black Metropolis-Bronzeville.

Oscar DePriest, who was the city's first African-American alderman and later the first northern black elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, lived in the community and established a political organization representing African-American interests.

CRITERION 6

Its representation of an architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other theme expressed through distinctive areas, districts, places, buildings, structures, works of art, or other objects that may or may not be contiguous.

The buildings comprising the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District were built during the late-19th and early-20th century, the area's heyday. As such, they reflect a unity of age and common development.

All of the district's buildings, though not adjacent to each other, are within a short distance of one another. Unfortunately, the depressed economy of the 1930s and the vast amount of land clearance in the 1950s and 1960s halted further development and brought about the demolition of many of the buildings that gave the area its distinct character. Nonetheless, the remaining buildings are linked thematically by their integral role in the development of "the Metropolis."

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

All exteriors and rooflines of the buildings as well as the monument and its setting.

APPENDICES

List of Significant Sites

The following sites are *not* included in the proposed Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District. However, each of the sites described did play an important role in the history of the Black Metropolis and Bronzeville community. As a result, they are included in this Appendix, even though the buildings that gave them their importance are no longer standing.

Site of the Jordan Building 3529-49 S. State St.

The Jordan Building, the first major commercial structure built in "Black Metropolis," formerly stood at the corner of State and 36th. Built in 1916-17, it was demolished in 1985 after it collapsed, weakened by years of being vacant and finished off by brick thieves.

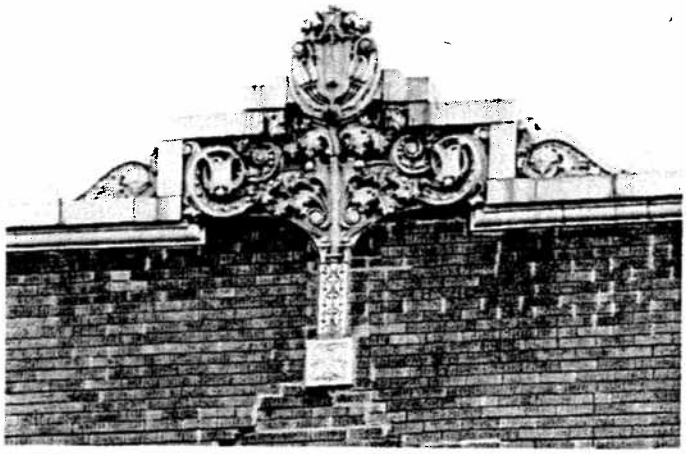
Referred to in *The Half Century Magazine* as "the largest commercial building yet erected by Colored men," the scale of the Jordan Building overshadowed all existing properties in the area, most of which had been built over the previous two decades. It had room for five ground-floor shops and eight five-room apartments on the upper two stories.

It had a bold presence on the State Street business district with its finely detailed facades of buff-colored, wire-cut brick and white terra-cotta trim. Designed by J.N. Coleman, whose practice consisted largely of South Side commercial structures, the Jordan Building was notable for its unique composition and detailing which were undoubtedly influenced by the work of noted architect Louis H. Sullivan.

This building also set the important precedent of new construction which had a direct influence

The Jordan Building was demolished in 1985, after it collapsed following years of brick thefts from a loadbearing rear wall.

The Jordan Building was notable for its Sullivanesque-style detail. Above, the building in 1984, a year before its demolition.



on the growth of Black Metropolis during the decade following its construction. Jordan retained ownership of the building until 1918, when he sold it at a profit before moving to New York City.

One of the prominent tenants of the building was the real estate firm of Anderson & Terrell, whose Pyramid Building and Loan Association was the first African-American company of its kind in Chicago. Anderson & Terrell also was involved in the construction of the Jordan Building.

For a number of years in the early 1980s, only three of the Jordan Building's ground-floor stores were occupied, and the balance of the building stood vacant until it was demolished in 1985.

Site of the Binga Bank and the Bates Apartments 3633 and 3637-39 S. State St.

Site of the Second Binga Bank and the Binga Arcade 3452 and 3458 S. State St.

The establishment of the Black Metropolis business district was due in large part to the efforts of African-American entrepreneur, Jesse Binga (1865-1947; see page 30). Although Binga's business ventures were housed in several locations during his almost three decades of business activity, his most significant achievements occurred at two prominent corners along State Street.

By the early part of the twentieth century, Binga's shoestring real estate business had developed into one of the community's major enterprises. In 1905, he purchased the prestigious Bates Apartment Building at 3637-39 S. State St., a previously white-owned and occupied, seven-story structure that had been built in 1894. He moved his real estate offices into the building and began plans to establish a bank.

Until that time, African-Americans were largely excluded from banking opportunities, due to the indifference of the white banks and the lack of African-American financial institutions. Not only were African-Americans denied the opportunity to establish personal savings accounts, but more importantly, they were precluded access to the business loans, mortgages, and credit that were crucial to economic development.

Using the money from his real estate profits, Binga established a private bank in 1908. He convinced the owner of the prominent--but empty--corner lot next to his building to construct a three-story building containing a ground-floor bank facility under a long-term lease arrangement. (He eventually purchased the building.) The new bank proved to be a financial success, becoming an anchor for the State Street business district and providing capital for additional development in Black Metropolis during the following two decades.

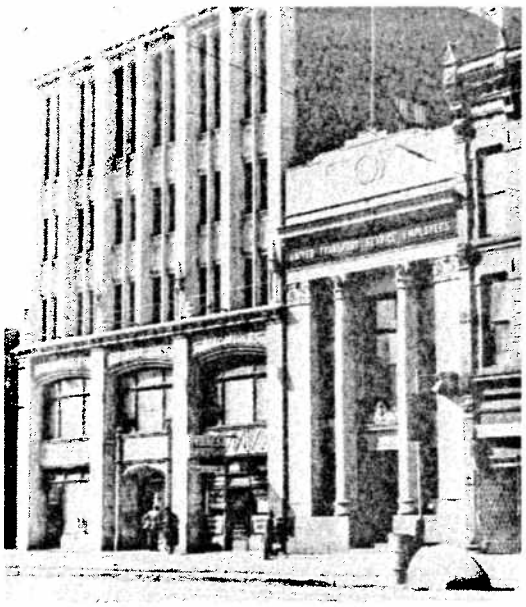
OPEN FOR BUSINESS
BINGA
Banker & Broker
General Banking. Safe Deposit Vault $3 and Upward. 3% Paid on Deposit Saving Accounts. Mortgage Loans, Real Estate, Renting. Phone Doug. 1565
3633 STATE STREET

A 1909 Chicago Defender advertisement for Jesse Binga's original bank. The building was demolished c.1975.

In 1921, when it was incorporated as the Binga State Bank, the institution held $300,000 in deposits. Three years later, the total was $1.15 million. The phenomenal growth of the bank forced the construction of a new and larger bank which opened in 1924 at 3452 S. State Street. Binga retained the bank's former location for his real estate brokerage office.

Binga took great pride in the 35th and State business district, the growth of which he had watched from its inception at the turn of the century. He was outspoken regarding the attempts to undermine it by the largely white-owned properties along 47th Street, stating in a 1928 *Chicago Defender* interview:

> *Most people don't realize it, but practically all our business institutions and our most substantial investments are located on or near 35th Street. Not less than $3,000,000 is invested by our people in commercial property in the area five blocks north and five blocks south of 35th Street between State and Cottage Grove. There is the Defender plant, Liberty Life Insurance Company, the YMCA, Pythian Temple, our largest undertaking establishments, the Overton interests, our most important hospitals, clubs and the bulk of our residential real estate investments.*



The Binga Arcade Building (left) and the Second Binga Bank (right) were located at the northwest corner of State and 35th streets. They were later demolished for the expansion of the Illinois Institute of Technology campus.

In defiance, Binga began construction of an ambitious five-story building adjoining his new bank building at the northwest corner of State and 35th streets. Known as the Binga Arcade, the building was the costliest commercial property to be built in Black Metropolis. It incorporated two floors of shops, two floors of offices, and a large fifth-floor assembly hall. The Binga Arcade opened in 1929. A year later, however, the bank went out of business, due largely to the effects of the Depression.

Unfortunately, most of these tangible references to Binga's Chicago have been almost completely lost. The Bates Apartment Building (3637-39 S. State St.) was demolished in 1938, and the adjoining Binga Bank Building was demolished during the 1970s. An undistinguished new building was built on the site c.1990. His second bank and the Binga Arcade (3452 and 3458 S. State St.) were demolished in the 1960s; their sites are now occupied by the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Site of the National Pythian Temple 3735-45 S. State St.

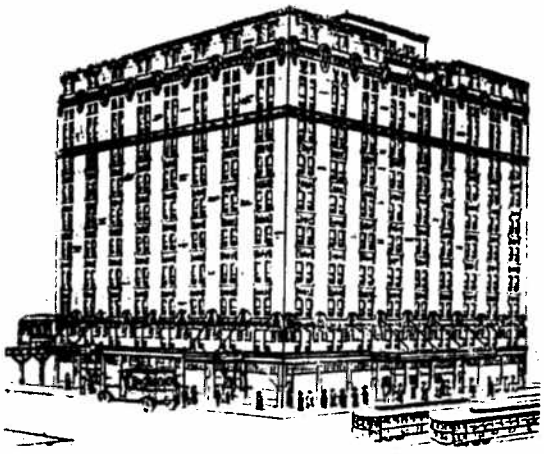
Promoted in the 1920s as the "largest structure in the world owned, constructed, and financed by Negroes," the National Pythian Temple was the skyscraper of Black Metropolis. Eight stories in height, covering nearly a quarter of a city block, and with a finely detailed exterior of brick and terra cotta, the building remained a prominent landmark of the community until its demolition in 1980.

Erected under the auspices of the Knights of Pythias fraternal organization, the building was planned to incorporate stores, rental offices, and lodge facilities within a single structure. Intended by its promoters to be a model project of African-American achievement, a concerted effort was made to ensure participation of African Americans in all aspects of its development and construction.

Financing was arranged through the African-American members of the national K of P lodge. An African American-owned construction company from the South was brought in to construct the building from plans by Walter T. Bailey, Chicago's first African-American, registered architect.

Bailey's design for the building was extremely picturesque, with an exterior of yellow brick that was enlivened by ornamental terra cotta detailed in Egyptian-inspired motifs. The building's exterior and portions of the lower floors of the interior were completed between 1924 and 1928, although financial constraints necessitated leaving much of the interiors of the upper stories incomplete.

Among the tenants of the building was its architect, Walter T. Bailey, who relocated his offices here from the nearby Overton Hygienic Building. The interiors were completed in 1944, when the building was remodeled to accommodate over 100 apartment units. The building was abandoned in the 1970s, and demolished in 1980.



The original architect's rendering of the National Pythian Temple.

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Additional material used in the preparation of this report is on file and available to the public in the offices of the Landmarks Division of the Chicago Department of Planning and Development.

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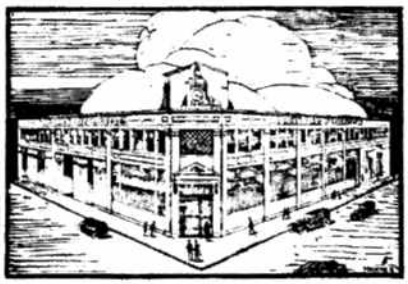

Another Milestone

LIBERTY LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY OF ILLINOIS is pleased to announce, through the Acting President, M. O. Bousfield, an increase of $50,000 in its capital. This amount not only swells the total of fully paid capital to $250,000, but represents another milestone in the already strong financial condition of the company.

The passing of the year 1925 therefore, leaves another milestone in Liberty Life's path of progress, which strengthens and reassures the company's policy holders in the continuance of excellent service and increased protection in paying every just death claim.

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Above: **The intersection of State and 35th streets, looking east, c.1953. By the 1920s, this intersection had become the hub of the "Metropolis" commercial district. (None of the buildings in this photo survive today.)** ***Top:*** **Advertisements from the 1920s for two of the buildings in the proposed Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District.**

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